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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3832

INFO RUEHWL/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY

RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 0143

RHMFIASS/CDR USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUCPDOC/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHMFIASS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHMFIASS/NAVINTELOFC GUANTANAMO BAY CU PRIORITY

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HAVANA 000835

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CCA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/22/2018

TAGS: CU PGOV PHUM PINR PREL

SUBJECT: MASSIVE CRACKDOWN TARGETS THE AVERAGE CUBAN

REF: HAVANA 818

Classified By: COM: Jonathan Farrar: For reasons 1.4 b/d

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Many members of civil society from various parts of Cuba have reported widespread arrests for petty economic crimes, such as illegal street vending, possession of building materials, and selling items for more than the official prices in the aftermath of hurricanes Gustav and Ike. Police surveillance has increased, most noticeably around the fruit and vegetable markets. There are increased signs of popular discontent due to the food shortages. At the same time, repression against dissidents continues an increase that had begun even before the storms. On October 15, police violently broke up a meeting of dissidents in a private home in Santa Clara. Dissident doctor Darsi Ferrer stated that on October 15 while walking in Havana, he was forcibly shoved into a vehicle and then handcuffed and blindfolded by state security agents. However, the Cuban dissident community appears to be at a loss as how to respond to the wave of repression and the emerging popular discontent following the devastation caused by the hurricanes. End Summary.

¶2. (C) In the aftermath of hurricanes Gustav and Ike, various members of Cuban civil society have reported numerous arrests for petty economic crimes throughout Havana and in many other cities. They tell us that many people have been arrested for activities, such as unlicensed selling of soft drinks in the street, that Cubans engage in routinely in order to make ends meet. Many have received jail sentences ranging for one to four years, in some cases after summary trials held in police stations rather than courts. We also have heard reports of people arrested for being in possession of small amounts of building materials, such as a few roof tiles or bags of cement. Opposition member Domingo Lezcano Arcos, said that a youth in his Havana neighborhood, who was stopped in the street with one bag of cement, received a one year sentence. Independent librarian Roberto de Miranda said that a youth in his neighborhood in Central Havana received a four year sentence for selling one egg at more than the official price. On October 21, in a very unusual move, since in Cuba the government very rarely publishes any type of statistics on arrests, the official Communist Party newspaper, Granma, printed an article on arrests for crimes such as "profiteering" after the hurricanes. The articles mentioned that 24.5% of the people were given prison terms, while another 21.3% were sentenced to forced labor. In the

past, such crimes were almost exclusively punished by fines. The article seemed designed as much to threaten as to inform.

¶ 13. (C) USINT employees and civil society contacts have reported increased vigilance by police and state security forces. Police are conducting traffic stops and searches of pedestrians more frequently. There has been a heavy presence of plainclothes security agents in the area of fruit and vegetable markets, whose stalls have been nearly empty the past several weeks. Officially they are present to prevent over-charging, but many civil society members allege that the security agents are also listening for murmurs of complaints from the general public. At the same time that security services are cracking down on these kinds of economic "crimes," we are hearing from contacts, domestic employees, and LCNs that there also has been a sharp upswing in common crimes such as burglaries, assaults and purse snatchings taking place.

¶ 14. (C) Dissident leader, Carlos Millares Falcon, stated that he has seen several incidents of people who never were involved in dissident activities speaking out. He stated that on October 21 he received a call from a good friend who related, while it was happening, the outbreak of a spontaneous protest in the streets of her neighborhood of Luyano in the municipality of 10 de Octubre. The friend said that without any apparent leadership her neighbors poured out in the street banging empty plastic cooking oil bottles, and pots and pans. She said rapidly a huge contingent of police and party loyalists from a Rapid Response Brigade forcibly squashed the demonstration. Millares and others also reported seeing anti-government graffiti. Except for

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official slogans, graffiti of any kind is almost unknown in Cuba. An example of the new signs is: "Preferimos al viejo con hambre que al Raul con sangre". (Loosely translated: "Better to go hungry with the old man than have Raul's bloody plans").

¶ 15. (C) There also continue to be cases of repression of dissidents. On October 15 police forcibly entered the home of Idania Yanes Contreras in Santa Clara. Several leading dissidents, including Ana Margarito Brito and Jorge Luis Garcia Perez ("Antunez") were present. Police overturned furniture and confiscated a radio, some books and copies of the UN Declaration of Human Rights. In the course of the action, a police officer allegedly pushed Idania's eight year old son, Roberto Alcides Riveras Yanes, to the floor, causing several bruises including to the face. Eleven people were taken into custody, and later released without charges. Yanes Contreras and Antunez are currently on hunger strike to protest the incident.

¶ 16. (C) Dissident doctor Darsi Ferrer told Poloff that on October 15 while walking in the street he was forced into a vehicle and then blindfolded and placed in plastic handcuffs. He was taken to a place where he was threatened with arrest if he did not stop his activities. The officials specifically mentioned a poll that he conducted in which he obtained responses from a wide range of people in various parts of Cuba. He is presently tabulating the results of this unscientific poll. Preliminary results indicate that the changes respondents most want to see are the freedom to travel, an end of the dual currency system and an increase in salaries. Several people also mentioned the marked deterioration in the health and education systems. Free elections or the freeing of political prisoners were not seen as priorities, according to Ferrer.

¶ 17. (C) Comment: The twin hurricanes have given the GOC the impetus to launch its most severe crackdown on the general public in recent years. At the same time, dissident leaders are frustrated that they are unable to capitalize on the growing unrest since they can offer little support to the rest of society, have not crafted a message compelling to the

general public, and are themselves under severe pressure from the government. Rather than pursuing economic reforms to stimulate production, the GOC seems focused on keeping the lid on public unrest until such time as the normal growing/import cycles bring food supplies back to their pre-storm (and inadequate at that) levels.

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